

Rome: Total War Strategy Guide (PC)

How to apply the theories of "Smackus Maximus" to become the ultimate conqueror

By [Dave 'Fargo' Kosak](#) | Sept. 26, 2004

(PDF by JeffJAM)

Let me set the scene: You're in your most comfortable chair, sitting in front of your PC, with the lights low, the significant other out of town, and the phone off the hook. You're about to conquer Rome. The sun has just gone down, and you're not planning on stopping until long after the sun has come back up.

I'm assuming that you've already put on your toga (see instructions, below.) It's time to crush anyone who stands in your way. But how?

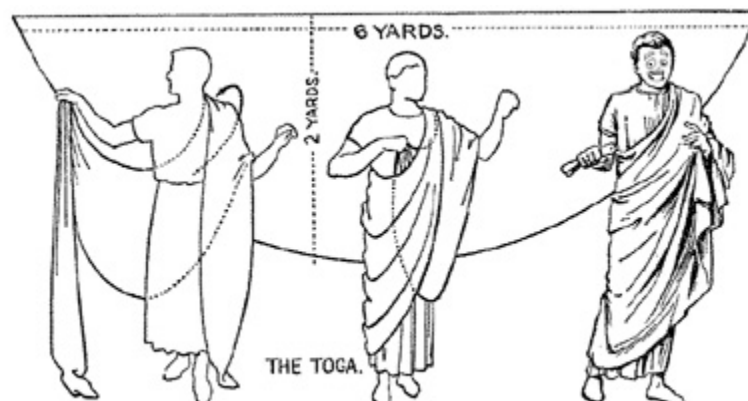
I wrote up this strategy guide because there was a definite *lack* of basic *Rome: Total War* strategies anywhere else. Even the 'official' strategy guide is just page after page of pictures of the units. Great -- that's what they look like -- but how do you *use* them? We want some vici, not just the vidi!

Fear not, Roman. Whether you're new to the game or you're an advanced player who just wants to compare notes, this strategy guide will go over what it takes to win the single-player campaign game. It'll also cover some general strategies that you can apply to the historical missions and even multiplayer, although the online crowd will prove to be your toughest opponent.

The cornerstone of my strategy is a little something I like to call, "**Smackus Maximus**." The secret is to always apply the most pressure to your enemy's weakest point. It's all about having the best economy, the best generals, the best governors, and the best battlefield tactics -- a fight fought on your terms is a fight you can't lose!

Read on to discover how **Smackus Maximus** can work for you.

- Cities and Governors
- The Importance of Your Navy
- Armies and the Strategic Map
- Espionage!
- The Five Basics of Combat
- Winning Battles
- City Sieges
- The Early Game
- The Middle Game
- The Late Game



It's just that simple!

Cities and Governors

Let's skip all the stuff about how to start the game or how to move your units around and dive right into the meat of winning this sucker. It starts with your cities, from whence comes all of your revenue and troops. Early in the game good city management is crucial: you want to keep your major cities growing and your taxes flowing. Later in the game city management matters less (if you accept the fact that large empires are going to get messy, you'll spend more time enjoying the later game and less time micromanaging.) But it's always good to know the basics.

Governed Cities vs. Ungoverned Cities

Any named character -- a family member or general -- can be a governor of a city. Those little white scrolls next to a character's name indicate how good he'll be at governing a city. The more scrolls the better: he'll be able to keep taxes higher and people happier. Cities are capable of running themselves without a governor, although managing taxes and public order will be trickier. So all things equal, it's better to have a governor in place who knows what he's doing. [EDITOR'S NOTE: An earlier version of this guide incorrectly stated that you can't control what buildings or units are built when no governor is in place. Not true. By turning off the automated build orders, you can queue up anything you want built, even with no governor in place. Thanks to reader Adam Faucett for being the first to mail in a correction.]

Having a governor in a city also has another advantage: when you bring in slaves from conquered provinces, only cities with governors get the extra population. It pays, then, to have governors in all your important cities -- even if they're lousy.



Here's a solid governor. Note how he improves trade income and how his influence keeps the people happy.

Great Governors are Born *and* Made

But where do you get good governors from? And how do you make characters better at city management? Here are some tips for finding good governors:

Marry carefully. Your daughters will bring home all sorts of rubbish -- say no to anyone with no worthy skills. If you need governors, look for somebody with a ranking of one or two in management. That's something you can build off of! In a pinch, someone with a couple ranks of influence (the little green wreaths) will do. But if a potential husband has no skills, and you won't be using him as a General, tell him to hit the road. Your daughter will bring home someone better in a couple of years.

Build Academies. These buildings (and their upgrades) will make better leaders out of governors who build them and stick around. Just by having a character govern a city with an academy for a while, he'll pick up a retinue of egg-heads to help him make wise decisions.

When all else fails, dazzle them with charm. Most of the time military leaders make poor governors, but one happy exception are ones with a lot of influence. If you have a General who's won a lot of battles, he may have gained a lot of influence. This can come in handy because people are happier when someone influential is in charge, and less likely to revolt. It'll do in a pinch, if you don't mind one of your better military leaders babysitting an important city for a while.

How to Grow Your City Population

Later in the game you'll have more people than you know what to do with, but early on you *want* a population boom. Only bigger cities can support the bigger government buildings, and hence the bigger recruitment buildings where you'll get more powerful units. Grow those cities! Grow them fast! **Smackus Maximus** requires you to grow faster than those around you.

The city information screens will show you how fast the population is growing, and if you drill down (click the detailed information button at the lower left of the city scroll) you can see a complete breakdown of what's affecting the population growth rate.

You can see that lowering taxes will have an immediate impact on city growth, but early in the game that money is far too important to you. You'll need it to aggressively build buildings and grow your army. So, I like to balance things out: I tax people as much as I can, provided that their loyalty is about at 100%. That should give you decent growth but still plenty of revenue.



Farms, buildings, and a lack of squalor will keep this town growing. Note the incredible trade revenue, all from the sea!

You can see that farm improvements will increase a city's population growth, while squalor will decrease it. For this reason, I always build farms as early as practical -- since population grows exponentially, the sooner you build farms the more you'll get out of them. And don't skimp on the sewers -- not only will they help your population grow faster, but people will be happier with less squalor (so you can tax them more.)

How else do you grow cities? It's not pretty but it works: slaves! The Romans were big on enslaving people from the frontier to make distant cities easier to occupy while at the same time boosting their economy at home. This is reflected in-game. When you conquer a territory, if you click the 'enslave' option, half the population will be spread out among your *governed* cities. Take advantage of this! Have governors in all your key cities. These population booms will help those cities grow to troop-factory megalopolises in no time flat.

Growing cities fast is a cornerstone of **Smackus Maximus**. You *always* want to out-produce your enemies, and you do that by having bigger cities than them!

Big Money: The Importance of Roads and Trade

Smackus Maximus believes in the power of the all-mighty denarii. First and foremost, in the early game, your cities are there to make you the big bucks. Believe it or not, cranking out troops is only secondary.

Here's why: To recruit troops or grow your cities, you'll need to buy buildings. Buildings are expensive. The sooner you build an economic building, the more money you'll make from it in the long-term. Follow? No? Think of it this way: If you have a lot of money, there are plenty of ways to raise an army. You can bribe away enemy generals. You can build barracks. You can recruit in existing barracks. You can hire mercenaries. You have that freedom, because you invested in your economy *before* you built troop centers. Focus on making money first! **Smackus Maximus** declares money the victor in all wars!



The Aegean sea is with all the trade routes developed. Athens alone is bringing in over 4000 denarii per turn.

So, how do you (as your spam email says) Make Money Fast? Roads, mines, and sea trade are the way. Roads bring in trade revenue, mines bring in direct revenue as well as increasing trade, and every port upgrade opens up a new sea trade avenue. Once you've built them up, additional buildings will really kick the economy up a notch: buildings like markets and forums. Build these early on. The sooner they're built, the more money a city will make you, making it easier to upgrade other cities, and so on. Once you're swimming in cash it'll be easy to toss military buildings in places where they're needed.

Roads deserve special mention, because they're so critical to conquest as well. Roads should be the **FIRST** thing you buy. **Smackus Maximus** is all about applying force to where enemies are hurt the most, and you can only do that if you can move your troops quickly around the map. Don't let cities languish without roads: Build them and pave them as quickly as you can. (Highways can wait a little longer). They'll pay for themselves in no time, and when you're using them to hurtle tons of troops at your enemies faster than they can recover, you'll be thankful to have a good road network.

So, What Should I Build?

I'm sure people want to hear exactly in what order they should build their buildings, but it's really going to depend on the circumstances. Buildings on your frontier bordering an aggressive enemy may require walls and barracks before you have the luxury of building up an economy -- try to avoid that, but sometimes, it can't be helped.

All things equal, here's a rough priority guide. Adjust accordingly based on the situation and the advice I gave above.

1. Roads
2. Basic Barracks
3. Farms
4. Sea Port
5. Temple
6. Sewer
7. Trader
8. Governor's Villa
9. Paved roads
10. Communal Farming
11. Shipwright
12. Market

From there, you can begin building military buildings if you need another city capable of cranking out units -- by then this city should be growing and profitable.

I ranked basic barracks high on the list only so that you can recruit town guards. It's helpful to have them around to keep the peace in a city, that way your more expensive troops can eventually move on in order to conquer more important locations.



The Brutii can build temples to Mars, which turn all troops recruited there into hardened battle veterans. Invaluable.

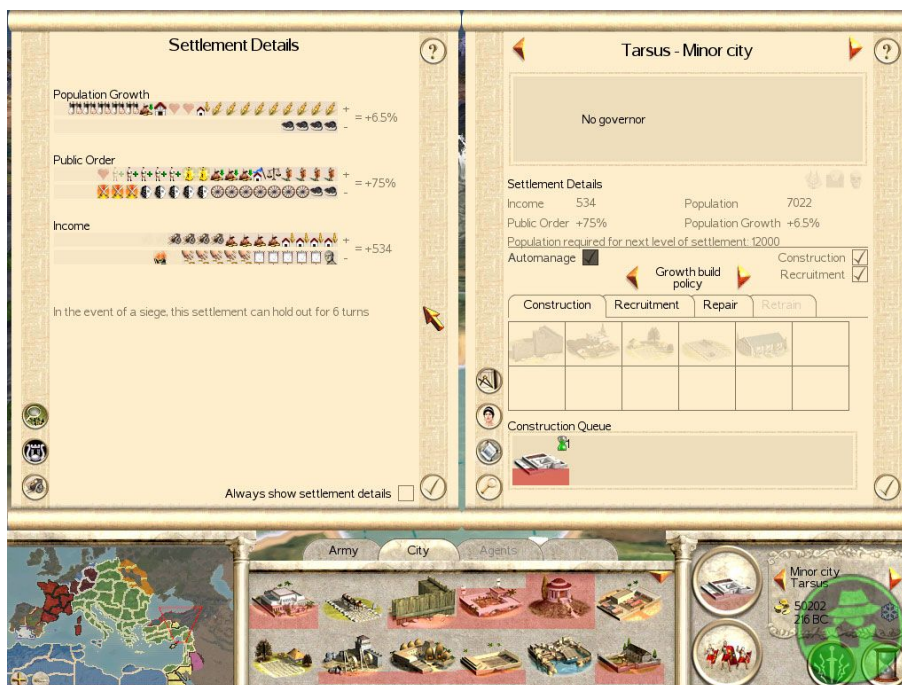
As for temples, every Roman faction has its own temples to choose from. The Julii choices are mostly about population growth or happiness, but the Brutii choices are more interesting: temples to Mercury are awesome for economic towns, particularly ones with mines, special resources, and sea lanes. Temples to Mars are perfect for cities where you intend to eventually recruit a lot of troops -- in fact, it's almost an unfair advantage, since you can crank out hardened veterans immediately! The Scipii can enjoy a similar advantage from temples to Vulcan (which improves their weapons). You can only have one temple per town, so choose carefully based on whether you want a town to be a profit center or a recruitment center.

I didn't list city walls on my guide, but obviously if there's even the slightest chance of a town getting invaded you'll want at least a wooden palisade to keep the enemy army in check for a turn while you rush up some reinforcements. Adjust your build order appropriately.

Hey! The Edges of My Vast Empire Are Revolting!

They sure *are*. They smell bad and are covered in flies. But seriously, once your empire is pretty big, you're going to have problems carefully managing your cities in the way I described in the last few pages.

There are a couple of things causing this: First you have the cultural differences, which grow greater the farther you get from Rome. It's particularly sticky in Egypt, which is why I recommend taking over the pyramids in Memphis (which increase Egyptian loyalty) before trying to conquer and hold this difficult area. Second, you have the distance from the capital, which causes more corruption and unrest. Thirdly, it seems that the computer players never bother to properly build up sewers or public baths for large cities, meaning that people in conquered areas are living in filth -- and they're pissed!



A recent influx of slaves is all that's keeping this town from revolting. The distance from the capital and the cultural differences alone are almost insurmountable.

There are a couple of things you can do here. First, sending half the population into slavery every time you conquer a new distant area helps curb their resistance while boosting up your home economy. If you're really brutal -- and later on you'll feel the diabolical urge to do this -- you can slaughter the population and start from scratch. The new city will repopulate fast with more loyal people, but you'll find that you have the same worries in a few years. And once a town is yours, there's no option to randomly kill off or enslave your citizens (bah!)

Another thing you can do is keep a good governor in these outlying cities, and have him queue up city buildings to help ease the suffering there. Sewers, baths, and amphitheatres will help... but chances are the population will grow faster than you can keep them happy.

Finally, you could move your capital closer. People still might be rebellious, but at least you'll see less corruption and more profits.

But ultimately, you shouldn't trouble yourself too much. The game intentionally makes running a huge empire hard -- you'll go nuts if you try to keep micromanaging it the way you did when you were small and clawing for every inch. That's frustrating, but cool in that it simulates history in an abstract kinda way. Here's the straight truth: if your empire is so big that you're having trouble at the edges, then it's time to maybe think about turning inward and taking over Rome. You've earned it. Put those armies to use taking *real* prizes!

The Importance of Your Navy

I was thrilled to see that naval strategy was more important in *Rome: Total War* than it had been in previous *Total War* games, because naval and economic warfare were always a key part of history (and fun whenever they're done well in a strategy game.)

Smackus Maximus demands that you always fight on your own terms, and that means that YOU need to control the seas. YOU want to make the surprise landings near undefended cities, not your opponent.

But more importantly, the seas are like big blue piles of money. Sea trade is the most profitable thing a city can engage in. You want to open up as many lanes as possible by building and expanding your ports. The Brutii can rake in gobs of cash once they take over the Aegean sea and all the lucrative trade routes there. The Scipii will roll in the dough once they've overtaken Carthage and enjoy trade up and down the Mediterranean. The Julii ... should hurry up and take over Gaul so they can get in on some sea lanes before they're all swallowed up.



An experienced admiral with a large, very experienced fleet. This guy can whomp anything that comes his way.

The Navy During Peacetime

I seriously doubt you'll ever actually be at peace during the game, but it sounded like a good section title. Anyways, any of your coastal towns should have a sea port, and you should make it a priority to develop the sea ports of towns that have extra tradable goods (look for those funny symbols on the map representing pottery or cloth, for instance, or mines.) Don't slack on this: ports will pay for themselves in no time.

Then, always consider building up your navy. A few piles of ships are better than a bunch of scattered ones. Early in the game you'll get a lot of "blockade" requests from the senate, which is easy money when you've got a few spare ships sitting around, so keep building.

Should war break out, you want to have enough ships to fight back your enemy while still transporting troops back and forth. Keep your eyes open to see what the enemy fleets are doing and make sure you've got the goods to match when things get frisky.

The Navy at War

In *Rome: Total War* your ships can blockade enemy ports. Sweet. Remember when I said that sea trade was a key part of your economy? Well, throwing up a blockade won't exactly kill a city, but it *will* significantly crimp up their economy. It's a great thing to do during a lengthy conflict, as you'll soon be able to out-produce your foes. That's what **Smackus Maximus** is all about.

Navies are also used to move troops around. Fortunately, it seems that you almost never lose an entire army to a sinking fleet -- even when you lose a sea battle, your fleet can usually get away with your armies intact. But it's a real pain to lose a few turns of smiting your enemy because your fleet was chased away by a stronger one.

Here's what to do: Get a pile of ships together. When war breaks out, chase down and destroy scattered enemy fleets, groups of one or two ships that are easy prey for your big fleet. This will gain you tons of experience. You can later use this monster fleet to win more decisive battles against bigger enemy navies. (Make sure not to run it too low on men -- you may need to go back to a port to retrain the units that are almost dead. Better, combine wounded but experienced fleets together so that their numbers are big but they don't lose any experience.) When it comes time to transport some troops, use your big fleet to clear a path and use little fleets to quickly shuttle men around.

The computer AI isn't too swift, so it rarely makes surprise amphibious assaults, but why give it the chance? A stronger navy means that you can keep your shores clean and theirs filled with blood.



By blockading my opponent's major ports, I've really hurt his ability to make war.

The Navy in the Later Game

At the end of the campaign you'll have a large spread-out empire and the goal of conquering your toughest foes on the Italian peninsula and just beyond. If you have a large Navy, this battle is a cakewalk. You quickly move all your troops from far-flung cities across the Mediterranean to Rome, while your big navies smash anyone who would stop the troop transfers. Then, as your navy chases the remaining fragments around the sea, smaller ships break off to blockade every port that isn't yours.

Boom! You've got tons of fast moving troops pouring into wherever you need them most, while your opponents struggle to walk their armies across vast chunks of land while their crippled, strangled economies can barely keep up with production demands.

THAT, my friend, is **Smackus Maximus**.

And it only happens if you pay attention to Naval development throughout the game. Those ports you build early on will bring in tons of money, and your Navies will rob your opponents of that source of income while quickly ushering your troops around. Pay attention to that navy, and always have a few strong fleets ready for action!

Armies and the Strategic Map

Okay, so you've been paying attention so far and now you know how to create productive, wealthy cities and a suitable navy ready for action. That's great, but cities won't be handed to you -- you've got to TAKE them. Because you're in competition with your Roman allies to get wealth, you'll pretty much want to be in constant expansion from the first turns. *Rome: Total War* is a total landgrab.

Fair battles between evenly matched groups of troops are fun, but the easiest way to win is to always make sure your army is bigger and better than anything they ever face. That's **Smackus Maximus**. Here's how to make sure you're always fielding better troops.

Not All Armies are Created Equal

There are several things to take into consideration when you look at the quality of an army.

The Rank of the General: The little stars beside an army show how good the leadership is, the tactical savvy of the General in charge. In all of the Total War games this statistic is vital! The rank of the general determines how well his men will fight, how long they'll fight, how quickly the enemy will rout, how hard he is to bribe or assassinate, and more. A great general can win against a weaker one even when all the other odds are stacked against him.



A three star commander? Excellent. He could use more missile troops and cavalry, though. His numbers are bolstered by units of barbarian mercenaries, but they'll cave if the fighting gets ugly.

The size of the army: The little colored banner carried by an army on the map will show approximately how many troops are there. A full banner represents roughly a thousand men. More men doesn't necessarily mean a better army, but outnumbering the opposition obviously presents an advantage.

The type of troops: You can't tell what type of troops the enemy is fielding until you actually move up a spy to check it out. The type of troops in an army makes a big difference. For instance, early in the game the barbarians North of Rome will field gigantic armies, but often they're light infantry that can be easily outmaneuvered or outfought. Bandit armies that pop up on the map can be almost anything -- a huge army of peasants will melt before determined legions or even light cavalry. Whereas a gladiator slave rebellion (Spartacus-style) will contain gladiator troops that, despite their small numbers, will take a huge bite out of any unprepared army. Numbers aren't everything!

The quality of troops: Little marks next to a unit's icon will indicate how good their weapons and armor are. (No icon means basic equipment, while weapon or shield icons will be either bronze, silver, or gold to show respective quality.) Chevrons will indicate how experienced the unit is: More chevrons mean more experience, with silver chevrons being worth more than bronze ones, etc. In combat, weapons and armor upgrades are helpful but don't seem to make a huge difference. But experience definitely shows: Experienced units will be the last to break. They'll hold your line better and fight better. This gives the Brutii a big advantage in the campaign game, since their temples to Mars allow certain cities to crank out highly experienced units at full strength!

All of these factors combined define how good an army is and how well they'll do in a fight. The most important, by far, is the quality of the general, followed by the composition of troops, then their numbers, their experience, and finally their weapons upgrades. Avoid any fight where the enemy army has a significant advantage over you: pick your battles on your terms. That's not just **Smackus Maximus** -- hell, Sun Tzu would tell you the same.

Recruiting Strong Armies

The temptation is to turn every city you own into a troop-generating center, but honestly you don't need to do that. Quality troops are expensive, and so are troop-generating buildings. You don't want to sacrifice your economic development for troop buildings that you can't afford to use every turn. Focus instead on having a handful of powerful towns that will continually generate your heaviest units, with roads and sea lanes that allow them to quickly get to the front. Use outer towns to supplement your army with light infantry. Have conquered towns immediately generate town guards who can keep the peace, freeing up your more expensive units to move on to the next conquest.

This strategy, combined with the knowledge that conquered enemy capitals will also be able to generate your heavy troops, should allow you to field large diverse armies without overspending. As the game progresses and your empire gets bigger, I also find that the automated city governors recruit a lot of mid-level units on their own, which comes in handy.

How about mercenaries? Long-time fans will remember how costly mercenary troops were in *Medieval: Total War*. In that game you really wanted to avoid it. With *Rome*, mercenary units are more affordable (which reflects how Rome would often hire the locals to supplement their legions.) If you've got a tough fight ahead definitely look to see who's available (some generals can recruit cheaper than others). It's great to be able to continue a campaign through enemy turf that you would've otherwise had to abandon. You can save money by disbanding the mercenaries once the immediate threat has passed, but if you want to keep them around it's not *too* costly to retain them year after year.



Have your big, important cities specialize in cranking out the highest-quality troops available to you.

What's a Good Unit Mix?

Different regions of the map will require different strategies (more on combat tactics in later sections) but some general rules apply across the board.

First, you need a 'backbone' to any good army. That means infantry who can handle a toe-to-toe fight. Early in the game you'll need Hastati to fill this role, later on you'll use Principes, and down the line you'll be using Legionary Cohorts and other heavy troops. Without several of these, you're not really going to be able to fight and win against a large, determined opposition.

I'm a big fan of cavalry. It's like the Roman Express: "Don't leave home without it." For most of the early campaign you'll be stuck with light cavalry, which will have to be used sparingly. But having horses on the field is invaluable. They can race around an enemy's flanks and break up their formations. Most importantly, when enemy units start to rout from the field, cavalry can chase them down and finish them off. That's invaluable: once the enemy is at your mercy, you don't want them to get away only to fight you again down the line or bolster up a city you're about to besiege. No, cavalry will help you WIPE THEM OFF THE MAP, never to trouble you again.

Later in the game, when you get the heavier legionary cavalry, they can really hack down light infantry or hold their own against heavier troops. In that role they can provide a major part of your offense, a mobile one that can repeatedly pull out and then charge into exposed areas.

Then you have your missile units. Early in the game you'll have Velites, the cool-looking guys with animals on their heads who hurl spears. Later on, you'll get roman archers or light auxilla. They're pretty useless against a strong formation of infantry in a toe-to-toe fight, and they'll be massacred if caught in a cavalry rush. So obviously an army that relies on them too heavily will be crushed. But if you've already got your other bases covered with infantry and cavalry, then these guys will tip any battle in your favor.

There are two places where missile units like Velites are useful. The first is after you've engaged the enemy, and there's a huge mob of them all piled on top of each other fighting your guys. Hurl those spears! Although you might hit a friendly unit or two, that blob of enemy soldiers is tremendously vulnerable to missile fire. Second, fast-moving Velites set on "skirmish" mode can harass slow-moving infantry. They're devastating against Greek phalanxes, who will pull away from formation to try to chase you as you thin their numbers, exposing their flanks for an infantry assault.

What's the best mix? A strong center of infantry troops, supported by cavalry, with missile troops to back them up. That's pretty self-explanatory, but it works. Vary your mix based on the enemy: Barbarians fight in the forest a lot, so infantry is more important than cavalry or missiles. The Egyptians have tons of cavalry and fight in the desert, so lightly armored troops with tons of cavalry is a must. The Greeks rely on slow-moving spearmen, so lot of missile units and strong infantry are the key. Change it up based on the circumstances, but always keep a balance, never rely on missile troops as your main force, and always be ready for hand-to-hand!

Your Generals and You

Earlier I said that generals were the most important ingredient in a successful army. True. A three or four star general will be able to cut a vast swath through enemy territory while keeping your losses minimal. When things are going well, you'll find yourself with a supreme commander, someone with eight stars or more. These are the kinds of men who make history! Treat them well, keep them safe, and they'll win incredible victories for you even if the numbers seem against them.

Over time your generals will get special abilities. They'll pick up a retinue of followers who will give them strategic advice (granting them, for example, bonuses to defense or lower recruitment costs). They'll pick up turncoats who will give them bonuses vs. specific types of enemies. In the long run these advantages add up!

On the battlefield, your general is your most important unit. He's usually a remarkable fighter, but you don't normally want to risk him in dangerous combat. Instead, keep him close to your troops. Having a general nearby will make your troops fight better and the enemy troops fight worse. For that reason, always keep your general near the thick of things, but not so close that he'll get encircled and killed.



Cornelius the Lewd: a TEN STAR general! Little can stand in his way with these armies at his side.

When a general falls, it's a crushing blow to morale. Inexperienced troops engaged with the enemy might break and run on the spot. I've found that experienced troops with a couple of chevrons will stick it through to the end of the battle even with their general dead, but with inexperienced soldiers it's a real crap shoot in an even fight. Best to keep your general alive and to focus on killing the enemy general!

Training Up a Great General

Few family members are born as natural commanders, although anyone who starts off with one or two stars has the makings of someone who may one day be great. Stars are earned through combat experience. But don't leave it up to chance: MAKE your generals great! Here's how.

First, those random brigand groups that pop up on the map may be annoying (and destructive to your economy), but they're a great opportunity. Rush a young commander out there with a promising mix of troops. Put that rebellion down! Sometimes you can get as many as two stars in a single turn: one for making them retreat, and another for finishing the army off. Wiping out a camp of bandits is a great way for a young general to cut his teeth.

You seem to have a better chance of gaining experience when you fight battles personally on the battle map. I haven't been able to confirm that, but it seems to be the case. Also, you're more likely to gain a combat rank for a decisive win -- where you wipe the enemy off of the field with no survivors. For that reason, if you're looking to build up experience, make sure you have cavalry handy. At the end of a battle, when you have the option of ending the battle or continuing it to mop up, continue the battle and make sure to finish off EVERYONE. That will gain you more renown and often more experience.

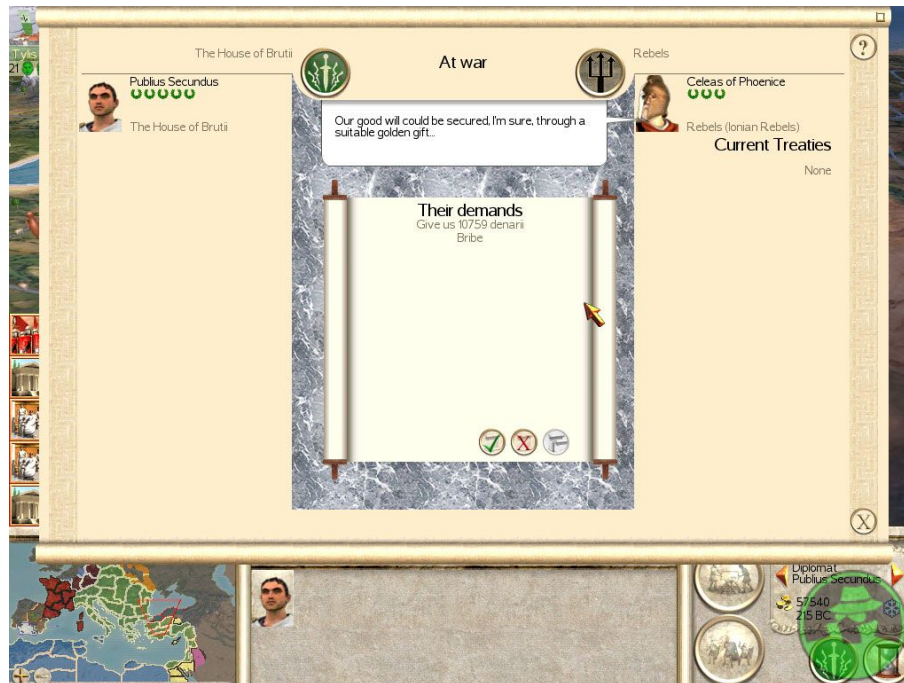
After you've gained a few stars, a four or five star General is a monstrous obstacle for the enemy to fight. Gaining more stars is harder, but not impossible, particularly if you're conquering a lot of territory. Besieging and taking enemy cities, fighting off large armies, and taking enemy capitals will continue to build up your rank.

Bribing Good Generals to Your side

High-ranked Generals are usually prominent family members, and they'll be almost impossible to assassinate or bribe. But lower-ranked generals -- the two and three star guys -- can be pretty worthwhile targets for your diplomats to try and convert. Send in a diplomat and see if the general will name his price. If you've got a lot of money in the bank (which is the whole point of the middle of the campaign) then this can be a really good deal for you. It's pricey, but you'll gain a good general, wipe out a small army without losing a troop, and protect yourself from a potentially damaging foe. It's worth sending a diplomat in to investigate.

Keep in mind that in some circumstances you might WANT to defeat a three-star general on the battlefield in order to get more experience for one of YOUR powerful generals.

I said that generals with a lot of stars would be almost impossible to bribe, but there's a handy exception: if you wipe out his faction. For example, I was embroiled in a fight with the Dacians, and they were in their last gasp. They had only two cities left, but they had an eight-star faction leader with a good-sized army who looked to stalemate the whole conflict. As he was marching into my territory, I quickly moved in to sack both of his cities and removed the faction from the map. At this point, the enemy King turned into an eight-star rebel general. Less of a threat, but still someone I didn't want to mess with. However, rebels can be bribed! He didn't come cheap, but hey, having an eight-star general added to your faction isn't normally a deal that money can buy. My former enemy became instrumental once he took up my cause. That's a trick to keep in your back pocket!



This four-star general with significant influence will run us 10K. Not cheap, but worth serious consideration.

Keep Your Generals Alive!

It's fair to say that an important General -- supported by the right mix of troops -- is the key to winning the game. He'll slice his way through an enemy, conquer huge tracts of land, and gain tons of influence that will win over the people and intimidate the Senate. **Smackus Maximus** is all about applying force, and Generals are a force of nature onto themselves, so naturally you want to *keep your best Generals alive*.

Obviously, that means in battle you don't want to throw your General away. Keep him near your troops but not necessarily in the thick of the action for maximum impact. When the enemy begins to rout, I sometimes allow my general (with his nice heavy cavalry bodyguard) to ride into the fray to help cut down the fleeing troops -- he seems to gain more prestige that way -- but try very hard not to put your general in a position where some lucky jackhole with a spear can topple your faction's biggest asset.

This would be easy, except the *Rome: Total War* AI makes it frustratingly difficult. If the AI is in control of your army (which happens whenever multiple armies are engaged in a conflict), it may frequently rush your general into a fight -- even against heavy infantry. I've seen it rush my generals *into ranks of waiting spearmen!!* That was just too painful.

So take steps to preserve the lives of your best generals. When staging an assault from multiple armies, make sure you're personally controlling your best general by having him initiate the combat. You might also want to actually pull your other generals AWAY from a massive fight before starting the battle on the strategic map (move them away but leave their armies in place), which makes absolutely no sense but is sometimes your only defense against the suicidal AI who would otherwise kill your nation's best.

I once assaulted Rome itself with four huge armies led by four generals, one for each gate. Spies had infiltrated the city and left the gates open and we outnumbered the enemy four to one. Nonetheless -- and for no discernable reason -- the AI killed off my three other generals. I don't know how it was even possible, except if they ran towards the enemy alone. I had conquered Rome but had nobody left to run it! Very frustrating. Protect your generals!

Espionage!

Individual assassins or spies on more than one occasion changed the course of history. It's no different in *Rome: Total War*. Now, if you don't have well-run cities or well-balanced armies, all the spies and diplomats in the world would be as useless as wings on a chicken. But, as a supplement to a strong army, they're invaluable. Let's talk about how to use these suckers.

Your Eyes and Ears

It's important to see the world. Spies and diplomats both allow you to plunge deep into friendly or enemy territory to get a better view of the world, but spies have such a huge range of sight that they're invaluable in this function. A good spy network will allow you to see invasions long before they're coming, or to look past the front lines deep into enemy lands to see what kind of reinforcements they might bring up.

For this reason, build out your network as soon as you can. At first you won't be able to -- you'll need your big cities cranking out troops. But as soon as it's practical, start building and sending out your agents to all your neighboring lands.

I can't stress how important spies are at gathering intelligence. Spy on a city and you'll know exactly what the defenses are and what units you can expect them to build. Spy on an enemy army and you'll see who the general is (if any) and what kinds of troops he has. Is he too heavy on the archers? Assault him with an army strong in cavalry. Knowing what the enemy will field before the battle is a huge advantage.



My spy not only informs me of who's waiting inside the walls, he can also open the gate about 1/3 of the time.

Spies and Cities: Yes

Always, *always* send spies into enemy cities before moving up your army. In fact, any serious invasion should be preceded by a mob of spies zooming up every roadway identifying every army and invading every city.

Each spy gives you a percentage chance of opening the city gates of a walled city from the inside. Even an amateur spy will often give you around a 20% chance -- that's one in five. Totally worth it! Multiple spies will increase the odds. It's such an awesome advantage to be able to rush into a city without waiting multiple turns to build siege equipment -- many, many lives will be spared on your side and the enemy will have less time to recruit defenses. There's no reason not to take the chance and have a spy in there before you attack!

Playing Dirty with Assassins

We've seen that generals are a huge advantage to an enemy army, so killing them off can really tilt the scales in your favor. Assassins are how it's done. It's not easy, but toward the middle of the game -- when you've got the cash and can afford to crank out a pile of assassins -- it's worth taking the risk.

You can take steps to make sure assassination attempts are successful. Never send in an amateur assassin to a tough assignment. I like to get my guys a little experience, first. Diplomats are nice soft targets! There's no good that can come of an enemy diplomat wandering around near your territory. He might bribe one of your captains away. So go ahead, make an example out of him: your assassin has a good chance to succeed, and a successful mission makes him even better at his job.

Enemy captains are also good targets. Armies that don't have generals in command are led by captains who won't have any bodyguards. Killing them off won't help your cause all that much, but it'll give your assassin some good practical experience. Afterwards, move on to juicier prey...



Killing another diplomat not only gives me tons of experience, I also get a cool surname: 'Appius the Killer.' That looks good on a resume.

High-ranked generals or close family members will be almost impossible to kill. Amateur assassins will have only a 1% chance, and even with experience it'll still be a 20-to-1 shot. That's pretty much a waste of a perfectly good assassin. No, the real advantage of assassins is in taking out low-ranked two or three star generals. It might take a few attempts, and you might lose an assassin or two, but it'll be worth it. A city defended by a three-star general will put up a huge fight vs. the exact same city with no leadership.

Assassins can also sabotage buildings in a city. I've not seen any cases where this is particularly useful. I suppose a possible strategy is to sabotage important recruitment centers in an enemy city during a prolonged war, but it's almost too much effort.

Assassins can, however, kill off spies who are protecting enemy cities. If you ever have a spy killed while trying to infiltrate a town, send in an assassin to check the place out. Killing off the enemy spies will make it easier for the next spy to get in.

Playing Dirty with Diplomats

Early in the game your sweep of diplomats will help you negotiate alliances and trade agreements. The latter are vital for your economy, particularly once you have several seaports in your possession.

In times of war, though, when you have a lot of cash, never forget the power of your diplomats as tools of war. The computer factions tend to have scattered groups of armies with only one or two units in them. These are cheap and easy to buy off. You can pick them off one by one before they can bolster the army of an important (and difficult to bribe) general. It's usually worth the money.

High-level generals are hard to bribe (see the section on generals earlier in this guide) but if you can do it, you'll gain an important member of your faction.



Support an invasion by using your diplomats to pick off scattered enemy units. This group of Egyptians will walk away for about 2000 denari. An easy win.

Diplomats can also bribe whole cities away from the enemy, but be careful when you do this. You'll get the city but no troops to support it -- it'll immediately go into revolt. The rebel army that will appear will belong to the enemy nation and it'll usually be ridiculously huge. So, don't negotiate for an enemy city unless you have an army that can occupy it that very turn.

Another problem with bribing cities is that you can't enslave the populace (most people wouldn't agree to that. Go figure.) This means that you'll have a really hard time controlling the city you've bought if it's far away and culturally different. For this reason it's often not worth it to shell out the big bucks just to get an unruly, angry, unprofitable city.

In times of war, diplomats are best served scouting enemy territory and sniping off small armies with bribes to remove them from the map. It's dirty. But it works.

The Five Basics of Combat

So far this guide has talked about the strategic, turn-based part of the game. If you play this portion of the game well then you'll have a distinct edge when it comes time for actual battles. You'll usually be able to bring more units to the front, with better equipment, and better generals. Still, you don't want to throw those men away with poor decisions on the battlefield. Let's look at what it takes to win!

Strategy gamers new to the Total War games find the battles fairly intimidating. They feel slow-paced. Sometimes your men will run away from a fight. The computer seems unstoppable. To the uninitiated, combat looks as though you just rush your guys into the enemy and watch a blob of people fight until one side runs away.

Not so! *Rome: Total War* may not be a perfect simulation of ancient warfare, but it does do a pretty good job of simulating the concepts and tactics that you would've wanted to apply on the ancient battlefield. Understanding these concepts will bring you one step closer to victory. So, before talking about specific strategies, let's talk about the five key things you need to know.



Look out! The barbarian cavalry rides in BEHIND the Roman battle line.
This will be over fast.

Key Concept 1: All Armies Are Vulnerable In Flanks or Rear

All armies march in a formation with a front, sides, and a rear. The soldiers in that formation expect to move toward an enemy and fight him from the front. They're not ready to get attacked from the sides and certainly not from the rear.

That's not to say that men won't turn to fight whatever's attacking them, but the effect on morale is huge. The very act of turning and trying to reorient will cause a unit to fight less effectively in those first critical moments, and it'll be a huge hit to morale.

Use this to your advantage! Always try to maneuver so that you can assault an enemy from his weak sides.

Also, enemies forced to fight on multiple sides will be particularly vulnerable. If you've already engaged someone, try to maneuver another unit around to hit them on the flanks -- men will start to panic. If you ever have the opportunity to sandwich a unit by attacking both flanks simultaneously, you'll probably cause those soldiers to rout immediately.

Conversely, guard your own flanks and try not to allow the enemy to do this to you! Always be aware of position on the battlefield.

Key Concept 2: All Units Have Strengths and Weaknesses

Most strategy videogames create an artificial "scissor-paper-rock" relationship between units, but *Rome: Total War* tries to model the more realistic strengths and weaknesses of historical units. This means it's not quite so elegant. Still, every unit has a function within a larger army, and understanding what they're for and what their weaknesses are will make you a much better general.

Different cultures have their own flavors that you'll have to get used to, but here's a rough guide to get you started:

Infantry: Usually these troops are armed and armored for close combat. They're the main body of your force, used to crush the main enemy force. Spear infantry work this way as well, but (with the exception of Greek hoplites) they sacrifice a little of their face-to-face combat ability in order to be more threatening against cavalry.

Strengths: Your best toe-to-toe fighters, a necessary part of your army that can engage the enemy and keep your missile troops protected. Spearmen are also your best weapon against cavalry.

Weaknesses: Maneuverability is the issue. Infantry is slow. Keep them together so that they can cover one another's flanks. Do everything you can to protect them from cavalry rushes to their sides or rear. Masses of infantry bogged down in a fight are also very vulnerable to enemy missile units.



Spearmen are a cavalry officer's worst nightmare. These Scipii are in for a tough fight.

Cavalry: Horse or camel-mounted troops give you unmatched flexibility on the battlefield. They're your most maneuverable units, and devastating when they charge an unprepared enemy.

Strengths: Use cavalry to rush around to the sides and rear of the enemy. Hit them where they hurt the most! The initial cavalry charge is the most effective, so don't be afraid to withdraw them from a fight in order to turn around and charge again. Cavalry are also instrumental for mopping up a fleeing enemy. Chase them down and kill them as they run!

Weaknesses: Troops armed with spears will eventually dismount and destroy all of your mounted soldiers in a protracted fight. Any infantry that has time to turn, face a cavalry charge, and prepare themselves will weather it well. A cavalry charge to the front of waiting spearmen is, in fact, suicide. Cavalry are usually outnumbered on the field and will lose a lengthy fight against heavy infantry, especially if surrounded.

Special Case: Elephants. I hesitate to call elephants cavalry, since they're such an unusual case. But inevitably you'll clash with these juggernauts, or you'll want to use them in battle, so it's best to understand them.

Strengths: Elephants are weapons of fear and mass destruction who are best at stomping down mobs of infantry. They kill fast and cause units to rout even faster. They're perfect for mowing a hole through light infantry.

Weaknesses: Spearmen are your best fighters against elephants, although they'll still die by the dozen. Your objective when fighting elephants is to scare the elephants into panicking and running over their own troops. How? Use weapons of terror: flaming arrows may spook them. War dogs may spook them. Flaming pigs are particularly effective.



If your infantry can corral the enemy into a clump, they're sitting ducks for your archers.

Missile Units: These fast-moving, lightly-armed troops hurl projectiles at a distance. Alone they don't win fights, but they're great at "softening up" enemy troops as your main line marches toward them. Normally you don't want them involved in a melee fight, with the possible exception of Roman Velites, who throw spears and can later help tip a battle in your favor by charging at an enemy already weakened by your main army.

Strengths: Densely-packed formations of enemy troops are easily cut down to size by volley after volley of arrows or spears. If your infantry can corral the enemy into a tight mass, it's worth risking friendly-fire to pepper them with missiles. Missile troops set to "skirmish" mode can also harass slow-moving infantry, staying out of reach while hurting them and causing them to break rank or expose their flanks.

Weaknesses: Archers are at the bottom of the food chain; any other unit that can catch them can pretty much demolish them. Cavalry, in particular, can rush up and slaughter an entire unit of archers in seconds. As such, they're only useful when protected by the rest of your army. Archers are also less useful against a spread out enemy, so if you're under assault from them and you're not about to engage in hand-to-hand, order your units to spread out their formation.

Missile Cavalry: These units share the same basic strengths and weaknesses of their counterparts on foot, but with the huge exception of being *very* fast. They can harass just about any unit with near impunity, and when the enemy starts to flee you can even risk them a little and use them to hunt down the routing soldiers.

Artillery: Onagers (primitive catapults) and ballistae (basically enormous crossbows) are built to mow down clumps of infantry. They're great as weapons of terror, or to soften up a large army. Onagers are also awesome tools for quickly taking down city walls. All artillery is slow-moving (or stationary) and will be destroyed almost instantly by any enemy troop who can reach it. Romans didn't rely on artillery too much, and you probably won't, either. If you do, keep your pieces protected and aim only at the biggest clumps of enemy soldiers.

Key Concept 3: Understand the Morale of Your Soldiers

Morale is a crucial part in any real war, but few strategy games model it. I guess the thinking is that it's "not fun" when your units cower in a foxhole or run from the field of battle. Maybe that's true for some gamers. But once you learn how to master morale and make it work for you, then using it to your advantage is very fun. Less realistic strategy games will seem flat in comparison.

It works like this: Units with high morale will fight better and intimidate the enemy more. As morale drops, so does their performance. Eventually it gets so low that the survivors rout -- that is to say, they turn around and take off running from the battlefield. In game terms, you lose control of the unit entirely. Occasionally they'll regroup and you can start giving them orders again, but understand that they're on the edge of breaking.



These Gauls have broken and are fleeing the field. This group of Roman Cavalry is about to make short work of them.

An exception is when units are completely surrounded. When morale breaks, they've got no place to go; they'll fight to the death. In *Rome* you can mouse over a surrounded unit and you can see when its soldiers enter this state. This isn't always desirable! Often you'd rather allow them to flee. For one thing, other units will see them running, which will lower their morale (particularly if they run right through another unit). For another, it's far easier for your cavalry to hack down a guy running away with his back turned than it is for your infantry to beat him as he's fighting for his life.

What impacts morale?

Friendly and Enemy Generals: Having their general close by encourages the troops. This has a huge effect on morale -- units will rarely break with their general right behind them. Enemy generals who are nearby have a slight negative effect on morale, but it's not as pronounced. Having your general get killed in battle will shake your soldiers up. Worse still is when your general RUNS from the field: upon seeing that, units on the verge of breaking will turn and join him immediately. Similarly, morale gets a little boost if the enemy general is killed or flees.

Experience of the Troops: Units that have combat experience will have little chevrons next to their icon. The more chevrons the better, with silver and gold chevrons being worth more. Experienced soldiers are far more effective in combat, and also far less likely to break. These guys are hardened warriors who will likely fight on even after their general falls. Units gain experience either by being recruited in a city with a temple to Mars or through action on the field.

Successes or Defeats: Soldiers are aware of the ebb and flow of the battle, as well as their own unit's performance. A group of infantry who just finished demolishing some troops will charge into their next encounter with high morale. They'll also be inspired if they see nearby enemy units breaking and fleeing the field. They'll be discouraged if your front lines are getting their rears handed to them, or if they're constantly being pelted by missile fire.

Field Position: Morale is badly shaken if a unit is attacked on the flanks or from the rear. Simultaneous attacks from multiple exposed sides can be crushing: units that were sturdy a second before might break and run. Conversely, units will perform better when they know that their flanks are secure -- particularly if they're covered by friendly units.



These troops from Carthage (center) were engaged in a pretty even fight. But the Romans (left) are about to surprise attack them from the rear. No kidding, the whole unit was dead within three or four seconds after snapping this screenshot.

Exhaustion: All troops start out well-rested and eager. As fatigue sets in, they won't fight as well. Exhausted troops, caught in a heavy fight against well-rested foes, will break a lot sooner. Exhaustion is caused by marching long distances, doing a lot of charging/running, and by fighting (especially if they're in heavy armor.) Be especially careful in the desert, where troops trapped in heavy armor will tire quickly in the heat.

Scary Stuff: Certain weapons are designed just to shake the enemy's confidence. Units getting bombarded with arrows or struck by rocks hurled from onagers will be shaken up (this alone will almost never break them, though.) War dogs are designed to cause fear, disrupting formations and lowering morale, ideally just before an infantry assault. And elephants cause the most terror of all: men will flee at the sight of their comrades getting mowed down like grass! Use these weapons to your advantage, and be aware of the effect they'll have on your troops when used against you.

Once you understand how morale works, you not only understand how to keep better control of *your* men, you can use it to your advantage when attacking your enemy. Keep your flanks covered, your general close (and safe!), and work to disrupt enemy formations and assault their flanks. Once you've mastered morale, combat will make a lot more sense!

Key Concept 4: Using the Terrain to Your Advantage

Rome's epic history took it from ancient snow-covered German forests to the hot desert plains of Arabia and just about everywhere in between. Using the terrain better than your enemy can sometimes give you a slight advantage. Here's what to look for.

Seek the High Ground! Particularly when you're on the defensive, you'll want to be positioned on the tops of hills. Your missile weapons have a longer range, and your enemy will have to march UP a hill to attack you. That'll tire his troops (it's hard to charge up a hill) and give yours an advantage (charging down a hill gives you a lot of momentum). If you're attacking an enemy on a hill, avoid the direct approach -- if possible try to come around until you're attacking from roughly the same height.



Units surprise-attacking from forest hiding places can be devastating.

Respect the Forest. If you position units in the trees, you'll see a little "hidden" icon appear. This means that the enemy won't be able to see these units until he's almost upon them. (Some units, like your general, can't be hidden.) Obviously this can give you a huge advantage: Hide units in the trees and position your main army nearby and slightly behind. As the enemy takes the bait, rush out and attack his exposed flanks. By the same token, always keep your eyes open in forests, because the computer uses the same trick!

Archers and cavalry are less effective in forests. The thick trees will block arrows and disrupt your charging horses. For this reason you'll find that the barbarians who haunt these woods rely heavily on fast-moving infantry. Respond in kind, or try to lure them into clearings where these units will be more useful.

Dress for the Weather. The desert heat will suffocate units in heavy armor. You'll notice that they Egyptians tailor their armies for these hot open plains: they use lots of light infantry and tons of cavalry. You should adopt a similar approach to avoid having your men tire out too quickly. Similarly, certain units fight better in cold weather -- the barbarians (with the possible exception of those freaky naked guys) are always prepared for the elements. Look at your unit detail screens to see which of your units are good at fighting in certain conditions.

Use Those City Walls. Stone city walls are like the perfect man-made hills: they convey a tremendous height advantage for archers, and until the enemy brings up a siege tower, the defenders are immune to infantry. Obviously walls are made for archers and are little use to anyone else. If you're planning on defending a city, make sure to have some missile troops recruited and ready.

Squeeze Through Narrow Streets. Narrow city streets present opportunities for both the attacker and the defender. As an attacker, you'll have the luxury of putting your toughest fighters right up front, with the archers right behind them, and you won't have to worry about your flanks. If your troops are of better quality than the enemy, you'll steamroll right to the town center that way.

But defenders share the same advantage. They can block off a street with their best fighters. Often attackers can get blobbed together in a street, the ideal target for defending archers. Cavalry is also restricted in city streets, so no surprise flanking maneuvers (although they can still wind their way through the maze of town streets to attack from behind.)



If you're not careful, your units will get jammed up in narrow streets. It's bad news if they're under fire from archers or the strongest units aren't in the lead ranks.

One note of caution about city streets. When attacking a city with stone walls, all of the wall towers will fire on you. If you quickly move into the center of the city it's not a problem. But woe to the army that has to walk along the outer edge before finding a main street inside -- the walls will constantly pelt you, and the casualties will add up. Before mounting your invasion, look at the city map carefully and plan your assault at a point where you can quickly make your way inward and away from the walls!

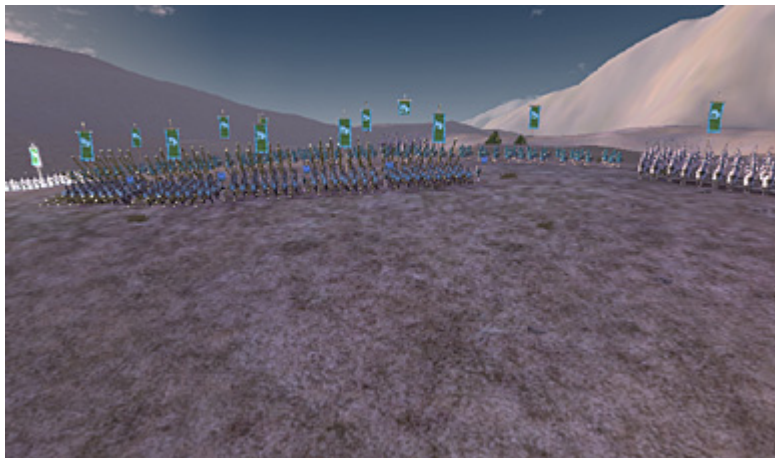
Always keep the terrain of a battle in mind as you position your troops at the beginning of a fight. Look for high ground, opportunities to hide, open fields that can assist cavalry charges, the streets where you'll bottleneck an assault. Always try to lure the enemy into an unfavorable position with respect to yours.

Key Concept 5: Know Your Victory Objectives

You're not always trying to simply win the battle, which is important to understand and will impact your overall strategy from the moment you begin placing your troops.

For example, if you're defending against an enemy who attacked you, then the onus is on them. They **HAVE** to attack your army before the time runs out, otherwise they lose. Knowing that, you can use the terrain to its full advantage. Plant yourself on the highest hill, or in front of a cliff, forcing the enemy to run at you from a disadvantage. When you're on the defense is the best time to hide units in the woods. Don't worry about moving up your men: keep them well rested! If you're getting impatient, just speed up the simulation until your enemy is near.

You might decide that your victory objective is to wipe an opponent completely off the map (for example, let's say you've got lots of undefended cities nearby. In that case, it's not enough to rout them from the field -- you want to be sure your cavalry is free to block off the escape and chase down survivors.



These Armenian defenders have lined up atop the hillside, a great place to hold. Notice the heavy cavalry guarding the flanks.

Sometimes you'll be faced with a battle that you can't possibly win. The enemy might outnumber you three to one, with a strong leader. In that case, you may decide that it's in your best interest just to take out as much of the enemy as possible. Set up ambushes so that you can pick off his archers, or try to surround his general in a suicide attack. You may lose the fight, but you want to make sure that he'll have so few men left from the battle that the army is no longer a threat.

When defending cities, the objective is the town square. Attackers should plot an attack point and a route to get there as quickly as possible while spending as little time as possible near the walls. Defenders should use this to their advantage; you'll probably know what route the enemy will take, and you'll know which streets to cover. Don't waste your time spreading out trying to kill the attacker (unless some stray units are easy targets); you know that he's got to make a move on the city center, so keep your men organized and defend it!

Knowing what you want to accomplish in a given battle will help you decide how to best use your force, and where to deploy them.

Keep these five concepts in mind and your game will be a lot stronger: Watch your flanks, know your units' strengths and weaknesses, pay attention to morale, use the terrain to your advantage, and know what you're fighting for. Now that you know these five key concepts, let's see how **Smackus Maximus** applies them for victory!

Winning Battles

We've covered the basic concepts. Now let's apply them! **Smackus Maximus** dictates that you will win by applying overwhelming force to the enemy's weakest point.

Have cavalry sweep around to enemy flanks. Don't be afraid to move them quickly (double-right-click to charge), since they don't tire as fast as footsoldiers. Don't give the enemy a chance to arrange themselves in preparation: engage them from the front with your infantry, then charge with the cavalry to disrupt and break them. The cavalry charge is the embodiment of **Smackus Maximus**: It's an overwhelming force. Use it again and again. Withdraw your cavalry after they've done their damage, turn, and attack another similarly unprepared spot in the enemy line.



Cavalry are slowed down by trees, but that isn't stopping these Romans from bum-rushing the flank of some Gaulish infantry. That'll teach them to rush too far ahead of their lines!

Harass the enemy with missile troops. Aim for clumps of enemy soldiers as they approach. Try to attack in a slight crescent formation so that you trap enemy infantry in a "pocket." That large conglomeration of troops will not only be fighting on their flanks, but they'll be easy targets for your missiles.

Stay in a tight formation while trying to break apart the enemy formations. Keep your infantry tight and organized so you have a clean battle line -- you don't want anyone to feel surrounded. Try to scatter the enemy by offering up fast-moving light infantry as bait, or by sweeping around to the side so that they feel compelled to break off from the main force. Then assault their flanks when they separate. You want every enemy unit to feel surrounded!

Roman infantry carried long spears, called "pilum," which they chucked at an enemy before engaging in a fight. This helps tilt a battle in your favor before it even begins. However, knowing this changes your tactics. You'll want to order them to attack as early as possible, so that they have time to hurl their full compliment of spears before charging. Also, there will be times were you desperately need them to attack hand-to-hand -- say an enemy is engaging your general and has exposed their flank -- where you wouldn't want them to waste time hurling their missiles. If this is the case, hold down the control key when double-clicking on the enemy to order them to charge without throwing their weapons. That's maximum smack.

Use of Your General

I already talked about the importance of your general in the section on the strategic map as well as in the basics of combat above. But it's worth it to emphasize how key he is: he will make or break your battle. Don't throw him away!

Keep him close to the center of the action, preferably right behind your main line of infantry to encourage the people who are fighting the hardest. Do not allow him to get surrounded by enemy infantry. Reposition him if he's getting hammered by enemy missile fire. Beware of enemy spearmen (most of the time your General is mounted.)

A general seems to get more experience if he's actually involved in the fight, so once things are going your way it's not a bad idea to have him rush forward and attack an enemy that's about to crumble. A charge led by a general is devastating to morale! Your general can also help chase down troops that are fleeing the field. Be careful that they don't rally and surround him while you do this! Also, make sure that in your zeal you're not pulling the general too far away from a battle that still hangs in the balance. He might be needed elsewhere.

Go out of your way to kill the enemy general. Entrap him, surround him, slaughter him. Killing him or making him run is often the first step in a major victory.



This Brutii General is well-protected, safe in a pocket behind lots of heavy infantry.

Don't Be the Victim of Smackus Maximus

Use all the tactics above to gain yourself an advantage on the battlefield. But watch out that the enemy isn't doing the same thing to you! Now that you know the secrets of victory, be sure to defend against them.

Your missile units are vulnerable. Velites can maybe hold their own in a fight against weak units, but most archers are as good as dog meat. Keep them behind infantry so that -- like the quarterback in a football game -- they're always protected.

Similarly, you want to protect your flanks from cavalry charges. This is hard to do if you're outnumbered (which is why you always try to bring more to the field than your enemy in the strategic map.) The best way to defend is to have some of your own cavalry watching the edges, ready to meet any charge. Alternatively, have some spearmen or spare heavy infantry pulled back slightly from the main battle line. When the enemy cavalry starts to swing around, face them and prepare for the charge. It won't be pretty, but at least you'll make them pay.

If you ARE caught in a cavalry charge, don't give the enemy cavalry a chance to pull out. Take a unit of troops and smash their rear or flank. Try to pen them in and make them bleed!

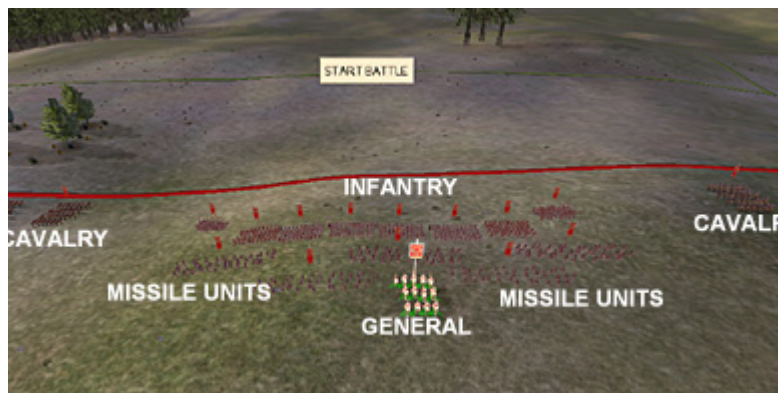
With a good mix of units and an eye for the situation, you should always be able to maneuver so that your strongest foot is kicking the enemy where it hurts the most. Once the enemy army starts to break, it'll have a snowball effect and soon the whole of their army will be in retreat.

Positioning Your Troops

Now you know how to apply **Smackus Maximus** in combat. Knowing what you want to do suggests some strategies for positioning your troops before a battle begins.

Historically the *real* Roman army would place their lightly-armored Velites right up front, to lead the assault and weaken the enemy. Those that lived would fall back behind the heavier Hastati, who had better equipment and more experience. If the battle wasn't already won, the heavy infantry would move in: hardened battle veterans whose success allowed them to equip themselves with the best equipment and armor. (In later periods the last rank of soldiers were the spear-wielding Triarii. The common Roman saying "It has come to the Triarii" meant that things had progressed to the bitter end.)

This strategy will work -- sort of -- but in *Rome: Total War* it's a good way to get all your light infantry killed. You'll probably prefer to keep them around. Try this instead:



One possible battle lineup. The general is in the thick of things but safe.

Infantry can close around the enemy so that missile units can pepper them. Cavalry is ready on either flank. Careful! There's a gap in the line.

If my opponent has a lot of cavalry, I'd move my own cavalry closer to keep my missile units safe.

Start with a core of solid infantry units. Early on you'll be depending on Hastati or Principes, but later you'll base your assault around sturdy Legionary Cohorts. (All my examples use Roman units, but it's often the same basic strategy with other cultures. Adjust accordingly). Line them up along the center of your line of attack. If you greatly outnumber the enemy, you might want to create a bit of a semicircle, so that you can surround the enemy and simultaneously attack their flanks.

Now you'll want to position your missile troops. If you're certain that the enemy is either slow-moving or far away, it's okay to have these guys right out in front. This way they can start putting the hurt on your opponent right away. Just make sure your missile units are set to skirmish mode (it's the default) so they know to fall back. Also, keep your eyes on them! While their attention is on the unit they're attacking, they might forget to run from an enemy storming in from another location. So be ready to pull them back on your own if you have to.

During the fight itself, you'll want your missile troops a little ways behind the main infantry, hurling their hell into the masses of enemy troops. Assuming that the enemy isn't preparing a surprise cavalry charge, I like to have my Velites fan out to either side. They eventually run out of spears, and then -- if the enemy is really hurting and I know they won't put up much of a fight -- I can order my Velites to charge into the flanks. They may take some casualties, but they'll get a lot of experience and that late in the battle they can cause enough havoc against exhausted troops to cinch the win.

Next comes your cavalry. Here you'll want to anticipate your enemy. If you suspect that he'll try to charge cavalry into your flanks, keep them closer to the center of your formation, behind the infantry and near your missile troops. That way you can quickly move to counteract anything he'll try.

More likely, if you play like me and always field plenty of cavalry, you'll have the luxury of being able to place them far to either side of your main army. Oh, can you smell the sweetness? As soon as the battle begins you'll be in position to sweep around and crush the enemy flanks, or rush all the way behind them to totally destroy their lines. Watch for enemy cavalry, which might rush at your horsemen when you try this -- and don't get penned in by enemy troops after you charge. Still, use those units to cause havoc all around the enemy. Mow their missile troops down before they even get to fire! Wade into peasants and send them scurrying away, demoralizing all the nearby troops! That's **Smackus Maximus** at its purest and most satisfying.



Placing cavalry far out on the flanks is a little risky, but it gives you the opportunity to close in and hit the enemy hard at his weakest points. Play it more cautious if the enemy also has a lot of cavalry on the field.

Finally, your general should be placed right in the middle of it all. Place him right behind the center of your infantry for maximum effect, or shift him over to one side so that he's free to rush around and slaughter the enemy army as it starts to break. Be cautious that your General never gets surrounded or attacked by fresh troops who might finish him off. His life means more than half your army!

When you're on the offensive, give the enemy no quarter. Place your troops right up against the border they can be deployed at, ready to storm the enemy. If your battlefield is intersected by a hill, and it's in a good location, put them up there -- you might get lucky and you'll have the option of charging down a hill at your opponent.

Artillery? Most of the time it can't move, and when it can, it can't move very fast. So, place it as far forward as you can, assuming that you'll be marching your troops forward as the battle starts. If you're planning on staying still and letting the enemy come to you, drop them behind your big infantry so that they're protected.

Lock Up Your Women

Julius Caesar was a voracious ladies man. So much so that as he campaigned through Gaul, his soldiers made up a song that they sang as they marched. It went something like, "Hide your Women / Caesar is coming!"

This has ... absolutely nothing to do with the game. I just thought it was hysterical. Let's move on...

Army Positions in Defense vs. Offense

The positions described above are appropriate for offense, and most of the time, you'll want to adopt the same formations for defense. However, because you're waiting for the enemy to come to you, you have more options.

Look for hills and get your guys up on top. Cliffs are perfect: you can have your archers at the edge of the cliff, pretty much immune, while your infantry covers either flank. If you're waiting for the enemy at the top of the hill, don't wait too long -- time it so that you've thrown your spears and started the charge while you still have some downhill space to charge in.

Attackers can rarely set up and spring traps, but when you're on the defense, it's part of the fun. Certain units can hide in tall grass -- position them so that they can spring up on the flanks. If you've got troops hiding in the forest, position your main army away from and slightly behind them. That way their initial surprise charge will be right into enemy flanks.



A good ambush will lure the enemy close, then pop out to hit his flanks.

Finishing the Job

You'll win the battle if the enemy routs from the battlefield, but that might not be your objective. You don't want them to regroup on the strategic map, only to fortify a city you want to attack or to rush to the welcoming arms of a powerful general. Most of the time, you'll want to chase after them and finish them off.

Cavalry are perfect for this. That's another reason I love 'em. You can even use missile cavalry -- hold down the 'control' key to have them attack instead of shooting arrows. Be careful that you're not attacking heavy infantry or spearmen with these guys -- if they turn to try to defend themselves a mounted archer is an easy takedown.

Often, half of an enemy army will break, but reinforcements will be arriving to bolster up the line and other parts of the battle are still undecided. Be careful! Don't let your eager soldiers keep chasing the enemy when they're needed elsewhere. Your army will soon be scattered all over the map. Rope them in and bring them back to a central position near your general until the battle is won for sure! Keep them together so that they can fight effectively against the remaining enemy.

If you've got a lot of nimble troops and cavalry, it's easy to surround the enemy. This may not always be desirable. Once they break, you usually *want* them to try to run away. If they're completely surrounded, they'll fight to the death, and you'll probably suffer more casualties than you need to. I'll often use a cavalry charge to completely surround an enemy, terrorize them, then withdraw so they can start to retreat. Then, of course, I chase them with the cavalry to finish them off one by one as they flee.

City Sieges

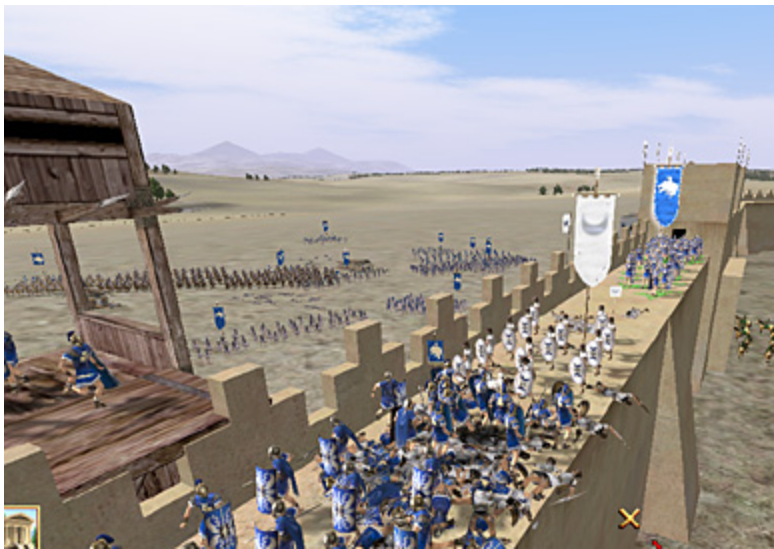
In real life it was immensely costly to openly attack a fortified city. Usually armies would just starve them out. In *Rome: Total War*, the game designers knew that starving people for three years is... well, pretty boring. So they make city assaults well worth it. You don't want to wait six or seven turns for a city to cave in on its own. You'll lose thousands of denarii in potential revenue, during which time you'll have to pay your waiting troops, while the enemy continues to collect revenue from the city. No sir! You'll want to assault that town as soon as possible so that it's making money for *you*.

Which is good. Because city assaults are cool.

Planning Your Attack

Study the map. You want to attack from the side of the city that has the clearest path to the town center. That way you won't get bogged down in corners. No matter how much you micromanage it, city streets will cause your army to spread out, which you want to minimize as much as possible.

Avoid bottlenecks! The defenders can really hurt you if you open up only one entrance into the city. Particularly if they have stone walls and your troops are all trying to squeeze through the main gate -- the gatehouse will continue to pour boiling oil over your troops as they try to fight their way through. Ugly business.



Using siege towers will deprive the enemy of archers on his walls, and if you take the gatehouse you can sneak your army through without getting worked over by boiling oil.

To avoid this, make multiple openings in the walls and storm through simultaneously. This is easy with wooden palisades: you can have your rams bash the gate and the two nearby wall sections pretty easily. For stone walls, it gets trickier. Over time I've come to favor siege towers, which allow my men to clear the tops of the walls, then to take over the gatehouse. (Click on the ground inside the city just behind the gatehouse to have your men on top of the walls fight their way through the gatehouse to take it over. The strategy, then, is to have a couple of siege towers hit the walls on either side of the gate. Then ram the gate down while simultaneously storming victorious troops through the gatehouse. The enemy, forced to fight multiple units pouring into the street, won't have a chance to lock you in the bottleneck. Plus, the gates, once taken, won't pour boiling oil on you as you try to enter!

Once inside the city, if the walls are wood, take the time to regroup so that all your army is together. If the walls are made of stone, chances are several nearby towers will still be owned by the enemy and firing upon you, so you'll want to pick a place within the city to regroup. Keep your army together! The enemy may be scattered all over town, but don't get distracted. You just need to hit the town center with everything you've got. Usually once you take it, the battle is over -- rarely will your opponent have enough left by that time to stage an effective counterattack.

How Do You Defend a City?

Hopefully you can tell from which direction the enemy is coming. Get archers up on the walls if you have them. Set your arrows to flame, which will give you a better chance of burning down their siege equipment before it gets to your walls.

Corner the enemy in a bottleneck where he doesn't have any maneuverability. Nothing is better than pinning them in your gatehouse while boiling oil sears them again and again.



One of the worst things for an attacker is to get bottlenecked inside enemy gates. The enemy works you over from all sides while the gates pour the hurt on your tightly-packed troops. Try to assault from multiple places on the wall to minimize the risk.

If you've lost the gates, or they're pouring in through multiple openings, you'll want to concentrate on defending the city center. Block off the main road with your strongest units and get your archers just behind. (Or if they're still on the walls they'll be able to turn around and continue the slaughter.) Take advantage of the fact that attackers get scattered by harassing their flanks -- see if you can rush some infantry or cavalry down the side streets to hit their light units on the flanks.

Make your last stand at the town center a glorious one. You won't have much maneuverability. Concentrate on killin'. Make them bleed for every inch! Sure, there's not much deep strategy to talk about here, but once you're backed into the city center there's not much you can do except to slug it out.

So there you have it: The basics of combat, techniques for winning a field fight, advice for positioning your units, and some tips for successfully attacking or defending cities. You've got some serious combat mojo now, general. You're ready to apply some **Smackus Maximus**. The next sections detail more big-picture strategies for the campaign game...

The Early Game

Now we're gonna pull back a little bit and talk about winning the campaign game from start to finish. Previously in the guide you learned how to manage your cities, recruit your armies, train great generals, and then use them for victory on the battlefield. But what about the big picture?

Rome: Total War's Roman campaign pans out like a three-act play. The curtain lifts and you've got two cities and dreams of empire. As you conquer your neighbors you can still take individual care of each city. The second act, the middle of the game, is a period of aggressive expansion as you use your power base to race out and grab territories. By the end of the middle game, you've got much of the map and chances are you've got a lot of angry cities on the verge of revolt. The late game begins when you decide all of Rome should be yours and march on the senate, turning old allies into enemies and asserting your dominance over the known world.



In the early game, you'll be concentrating on immediate threats. Like some Sicilian housecleaning.

So let's start with the early game. What are you trying to do here, and how should you do it? First, we'll paint the scene: You're moving out, running errands for the senate and conquering cities. You have enough governors and the patience to take individual care of each city. You'll be spending money as soon as you've made it, working hard to build your economy and recruit troops to fight several key decisive battles against opponents who are roughly as strong as you.

Your goal in the early game is to create a "power base," a core group of cities that will supply you with money and soldiers for all future conquests. You want to do three things:

Build Up Your Economy, ensuring that cities are profitable now and that you're investing in the future.

Grow Your Population in key cities. Until they grow, you won't be able to build bigger governor buildings, which means you won't be able to build better economic or military buildings.

Develop Your Military Capacity. First, that means doing both of the above, so that you've got a couple key cities that can churn out powerful units for you. It also means training up one or two generals who can lead you on massive conquests.

Every faction has their own boogeymen to conquer during this initial phase of the game. The Julii will march up through Gaul, and should also consider capturing parts of Spain in order to get in on the lucrative sea trade. The Brutii will be hellbent on conquering the Greeks and Macedonians, so brush up on your phalanx-fighting capabilities. The Scipii should be focused on taking over Sicily and then finishing off Carthage, which will open them up to all the profitable sea trade that made Carthage such a Mediterranean power.

Developing that economy is key! You'll probably be spending money as fast as it comes in, so always look for opportunities for a quick buck. Enslave enemy cities for cash and to bolster your population. Take every senate mission. Strike deals with other nations to earn yourself quick cash. Make sure to land trade agreements with everyone you meet.

There's no clear dividing line for when this early struggle for survival turns into the middle game. You'll know it when it happens, though. One day, all of a sudden, you'll start sweeping across the land capturing cities that can't put up a defense. You'll be outproducing all of your neighbors. You'll make a huge profit each turn despite aggressively building. Ah, that's the stuff: you're not a bit player anymore. You're ready for the middle game!

The Middle Game

The middle game begins when your immediate foes have been taken care of, when you've got a solid economy, and when you're trucking across the map like a freight train filled with hurt. Here your objectives change a little.

Develop Your Powerbase. You want to build up your central cities while grabbing as much territory as possible. You're no longer worried about carefully managing each city. Do what it takes to keep them profitable and not rebelling, but don't sweat it. Your army will start to grow so huge that some cities won't be able to bring in a profit turn after turn -- that's okay. You're worried about the big picture now, making sure your overall profits are positive.

Building Your Navy. Some players might not see this as a big deal, and it's possible to win the game without doing this. But having the most powerful navy on the map before making your move on Rome is very valuable, especially as you try to shuttle troops around. It's relatively easy to build up a powerful (and experienced) fleet, and you should be concentrating on developing your ports for economic reasons anyway.

Conquer Land. Your Roman "allies" will be doing this as well. You need to outpace them. Conquering land will not only fuel your economic engine and give you tons of places to recruit troops from, it'll also increase your reputation with the people of Rome. You'll need their support to win the game, but they're easy to please: just continually dazzle them with conquest after conquest!

Stockpile Cash. Once your economy is clipping this is easy to do. Remember, you're gearing up for a HUGE fight against your toughest foes back on the Italian peninsula. When it comes time for Armageddon, YOU want to have enough cash handy to do impressive things. With a huge stockpile of cash you'll be able to bribe away whole armies or build the most expensive buildings without flinching. You'll need to crank out and maintain the most expensive units in the game. Stockpile cash now, during your conquests, so that this final phase of the game will be a cakewalk.

The middle game is one continuous war campaign. Well, okay, the whole game is one big war. But here your object is just wanton conquest. Grab those juicy enemy capitals and bring them into your economy. Build lots of roads and develop the economies of outlying villages so that you're raking in the cash. Before long your advisors should start telling you that you're the richest faction in the world. Good. Now you've got options for when things get ugly.

And they will get ugly! Eventually the provinces far away from your capital will be almost impossible to maintain control of. That's okay. Running a huge empire isn't easy. By the time that starts happening, though, you should be a local hero in Rome. The senate will start to fear you. Time to put all that money and all those troops to some use ... time to march on Rome!!

The End Game

The end game begins once you decide that you've got everything you need to take on both of your Roman allies simultaneously. You'll need the support of the people to make it happen. Don't delay your move for too long. The other Roman factions will eventually overcome their immediate foes and suddenly they'll start to explode with exponential growth -- they're hitting the middle game. Don't let them grow. Strike them down!

When it's time to make your move, take a couple of turns to march your army from the outer provinces toward Rome before you strike. You don't want to give your enemies a chance to prepare. Choose some targets that'll hurt your rivals immediately -- you'll want them on the defensive from the moment the poop hits the fan. Get your armies ready for a decisive first strike. And infiltrate EVERYONE with spies!

Once you're in position, hit the senate first. Rome itself shouldn't be a problem. A tough fight, sure -- but it's right next to your biggest and most productive cities, and you'll no doubt be assaulting it with your most revered general. Nobody will be nearby to help out. Smash it and wipe the senate off the map in one stroke.



Rome is yours!!

Now you're emperor of all of the Roman Empire, but your Roman rivals won't see it that way. Your biggest fight is underway. Hit them with everything you've got!

Use your navies to blockade all the enemy ports, and start harassing rival fleets immediately. You can't risk a landing of fresh enemy troops: make it a priority to wipe their navies off the map. After your blockades are up, the enemy economies will be squeezed so tight that they'll have trouble mustering up armies to stop you.

Concentrate on unifying the Italian peninsula first. You'll face two battles against fortified cities that will likely be harder than taking Rome itself. But this is the heart of your enemy -- once you've overcome the peninsula, and your navy is in place, there's little that can stop you.

Winning the game requires 50 provinces to be in your possession. I recommend taking them from your Roman rivals, both as a defensive measure and also because they'll be close to your capital and easy to control. In fact, with your army concentrating on Rome, tricky areas like Egypt might rebel. Let them go. You've got bigger fish to fry in the center of the map.

Roman armies are among the toughest in the world: your final battles will be your hardest. On the other hand, by this time you'll be out-producing your rivals many times over. Things will eventually shift in your favor. Start skinning grapes and call over the orgy girls: you're the new Caesar, baby!

There you have it: **Smackus Maximus**, a tactic of applying the most force to the weakest part of the enemy. Getting the most force requires running the strongest possible economy with the best possible forces and the best available generals. Applying it to the weakest point is all about crafty tactics on both the battlefield and the strategic map. Do this well and no force in the Mediterranean can stop you. Hide your women, Caesar is coming!